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January 26, 2018

By Lauren Ohnesorge

State regulators in North Carolina have given the Atlantic Coast Pipeline permission to move forward in eight of its counties.

The approval, issued Friday by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, is contingent on certain conditions for testing and monitoring.

As NCDEQ Secretary [Michael Regan](#) cautioned in a prepared statement, it doesn't mean the state won't continue its due diligence.

"Our job doesn't end with the granting of the permit but continues as we hold the company accountable to live up to its commitments," he stated. "Our efforts have resulted in a carefully crafted permit that includes increased environmental protections while giving us the tools we need to continue close oversight of this project as it moves forward."

Specifically, the state granted the project what's called a 401 water quality certification. ACP had first applied for it in May, with the state going back to the company on five occasions to request additional information.

Contingencies include monitoring of stream and wetland restorations and requirements that ACP "work in the dry" as much as possible.

"All stream-crossing construction activities must be conducted using best practices to divert water and limit potential sediment pollution in streams," NCDEQ specifies. Additionally, ACP must use a "horizontal directional drill" when crossing the Neuse River, document drilling fluids and additives used, conduct private well testing, submit to regular inspections and undertake stormwater protections.

ACP will also need to obtain an air quality permit for a compressor station in Northampton County, in the northeastern part of the state. The project still needs general stormwater permits for Nash and Cumberland counties and approval of the erosion and sediment control plan for its northern segment. At the federal level, it also needs a water quality permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In a prepared statement, ACP commended NCDEQ staff "for the years of hard work and careful study" and thanked the public for "the thoughtful and constructive input."

"Today's approval brings North Carolina one step closer to a growing economy, thousands of new jobs and lower energy costs for consumers," the statement reads. "With new infrastructure, the region will be able to attract manufacturers and other new industries, and the good-paying jobs they bring."

Economic developers were celebrating the news minutes after it was announced.

"Hopefully we can proceed forward and begin to market the opportunity, not just to our existing industries but also companies considering the area," says Chris Johnson, economic development director of Johnston County.

But the project, a partnership between [Duke Energy](#) and Dominion Energy, had created controversy, particularly from landowners along the stretch – many of whom have refused to voluntarily sign over their properties.

The companies are already pursuing permission for some of those parcels through eminent domain. And, through specially obtained permission from the feds, they had started preliminary vegetation clearing.

Project spokesman Aaron Ruby says about 80 percent of landowners have reached agreements with ACP, but declines to break it out by state.

ACP and its partners are also putting \$57.8 million into a new clean energy fund, to be used for environmental mitigation initiatives such as reducing the carbon footprint.

Gov. Roy Cooper, whose office has repeatedly ignored requests to outline his stance on the natural gas pipeline in the past, released a statement Friday on the fund.

"My goal for North Carolina is complete reliance on renewable energy, which builds a cleaner environment and a stronger economy," Cooper stated. "During the time it takes us to get to a full renewable energy future, we will still need to rely on other fuels as we move away from the pollution of coal-fired power plants."

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